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## **The Perception of the Sources of Self-Efficacy and the Intensity of the Dimensions of Attitude Towards Volunteering Amongst Prisoners**

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### **Abstract**

The authors of this article refer to the issues related to inclusive resocialization and emphasize that voluntary work of prisoners could constitute social capital towards readaptation. The article discusses categories of volunteering and self-efficacy that are the subject of empirical

inquiry, the state of research to date on the issues taken up, and the qualities of volunteer work of prisoners for the benefit of the outside world. The study conducted aims to examine how attitudes toward volunteering are formed in prisoners, in relation to sources of perceived self-efficacy. The research was conducted on a group of 119 inmates incarcerated in a penitentiary unit in the Lublin Province in Poland, with the aim of determining the correlates occurring between attitudes toward volunteering and factors influencing self-efficacy in prisoners. The study found that emotional factors (positive or negative feelings related to volunteering) were the leading correlating factors with attitudes towards volunteering, these include perceptions of success and failure as well as the intensity of social persuasion or stress.

**Keywords:** sources of self-efficacy, intensity of stress, successes and failures, persuasion from others, dimensions of attitude towards volunteering, prisoners.

## Introduction

Volunteering is conceptualized as “a conscious, voluntary, and unpaid activity undertaken for the benefit of others in need, extending beyond familial or friendship-based relationships” (Ochman & Jordan, 1997, p. 15). The term has gained prominence alongside the evolution of social organizations, which have become increasingly influential in fostering social development. Volunteer engagement embodies the principles of civic society by reflecting a selfless commitment to prosocial action in support of others (Olszewski, 2009). A fundamental component of such engagement is its voluntary nature, as well as the expression of individual altruistic behavior and civic involvement (Güntert et al., 2022). Volunteering constitutes a broader construct than charity, benevolence, or philanthropy, which are typically characterized by episodic or one-time acts of aid. In contrast, volunteering is generally marked by sustained, long-term involvement. In line with its philosophy, anyone can assume the role of a volunteer, regardless of age, educational background, or professional qualifications. Literature identifies a close conceptual association between volunteering and altruism, defined as intentional and goal-directed prosocial behavior that often occurs despite potential personal costs (Karyłowski, 1982; Nowak, 2010a, 2010b; Nahra, 2012).

Volunteer activity is typically polymotivational in nature, meaning it is initiated by more than a single motivational determinant. These diverse motives may coexist and form a hierarchical structure that influences the de-

gree of one's prosocial engagement (Sowiński, 2005, pp. 86–101). Motivations to partake in volunteering are rooted in both intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Klug et al., 2018; Carvalho et al., 2021), influenced by: self-awareness and personal growth, internalized values, religious beliefs, social approval, and the desire to contribute to societal well-being and intercultural understanding. The most frequent reason for helping others - often undertaken despite personal costs - is the emotional gratification derived from such acts (Murphy & Ackermann, 2013; Nowak, 2013; Khan & Imran, 2022).

The beneficial impact of volunteering manifests in the strengthening of solidarity, the enhancement of overall well-being, leading towards longer and healthier lives (IAVE, 2001; Snyder & Omoto, 2008; Carvalho et al., 2021) as well as contributing to the enrichment of both the cultural and relational dimensions of individuals engaged in such behaviors (Parboteeah et al., 2004; Serapioni et al., 2013).

Basing on the structural model of attitudes, it can be posited that an individual's attitude toward volunteering comprises three components (Allport, 1950; Mądrzycki, 1997): 1) cognitive – beliefs, knowledge, and cognitive evaluations regarding volunteering; 2) affective – positive or negative emotional responses toward the phenomenon; 3) behavioral – observable actions taken or lack thereof in the context of volunteering.

One of the key variables in explaining the preference of certain attitudes towards volunteering is the analysis of the sources of self-efficacy, as conceptualized within Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997, pp. 191–215), which describes human behavior as the result of constant interactions among cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants. The author defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors of a certain level of difficulty, achieve set goals and/or the belief of high effectiveness of potential action in previously unknown conditions (Bandura, 1989, pp. 18–33).

Self-efficacy beliefs play a crucial role in the process of human motivation as it corresponds with their mobilization, perseverance as well as the ability to tolerate stress associated with performing certain tasks. As Bandura (1991, p. 253) remarked, people who lack assertiveness know what to do, but they are ineffective in translating that knowledge into assertive action. Empirical findings have substantiated the theoretical postulates of Social Cog-

nitive Theory, indicating that self-efficacy is pivotal in motivating behavior, making decisions, exerting effort into goal achievement, succeeding in goal attainment, managing one's own life, coping with life challenges, and shaping one's self-concept (Şeđek, 1983; Pervin, 2002; Wosińska, 2004; Cattelino et al., 2019). Moreover, self-efficacy is closely linked to both internal locus of control and the perceived sense of competence (Nowak, 2012).

According to the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999, pp. 154–196), self-efficacy beliefs is influenced by factors originating from sources such as:

1. Mastery experiences – the experience of successes and failures in the process of;
2. Vicarious experiences – observing others perform successfully in various situations;
3. Verbal persuasion – receiving evaluative feedback on the actions taken;
4. Emotional and physiological states – including affective arousal, stress responses, and the individual's overall somatic condition during task execution.

These determinants of perceived self-efficacy are expected to significantly influence individual attitudes toward volunteering, as they shape the strength of internal psychological mechanisms in the form of perceived self-efficacy, which in turn determines the occurrence of certain behaviors and/or attitudes (Bandura, 2001, pp. 121–153).

Both attitudes toward volunteering and perceived self-efficacy are particularly important in the process of social reintegration for incarcerated individuals. In correctional facilities across Poland, institutional programs have been implemented to engage inmates in various forms of voluntary service (ranging from ongoing and structured involvement to one-time community initiatives) on behalf of external organizations. Participants are carefully selected by prison administrators based on specific predispositions such as emotional sensitivity, as well as openness to new experiences after which, their suitability is re-evaluated at the facility to which they are assigned. By undertaking unpaid labor, such as construction, maintenance, or caregiving tasks, prisoners develop social competencies, enhance their sense of agency, and increase their sensitivity to the needs of others (Braun, 2019). Volunteer participation in this context fosters empathic concern for others and offers inmates the opportunity to reframe their self-perception and how they perceive their lives, as well

as overcoming social barriers. It supports the transformation of their value systems and the establishment of new and constructive life goals (Sokołowska, 2015), reinforcing their self-efficacy beliefs and fostering task-oriented coping strategies in the face of difficulty.

The aim of this article is to explore the relationship between perceived sources of self-efficacy and the dimensions of attitudes toward volunteering among incarcerated individuals. The subsequent sections present a review of existing research, outline the conceptual framework and methodology of the present study, and discuss empirical findings and conclusions.

## **State of research on the issue**

The relationship between the experience of self-efficacy and the development of the cognitive dimension of attitudes is rooted in the acquisition of new experiences, the awareness of the consequences of one's actions, and the construction of self-image, particularly in terms of one's resourcefulness (Myers, 2003). The association between perceived sources of self-efficacy and the emotional dimension of attitudes is primarily connected to physiological states and/or specific emotional experiences encountered during task performance, such as stress (Wojciszke, 2009). Meanwhile, the correlation between experiences of self-efficacy sources and the behavioral dimension of attitudes is related to the reinforcement of behaviors rewarded through success, the suppression of actions leading to failure, and the observation of consequences of behaviors exhibited by the social environment (Szymczak, 2013, pp. 267–273). It should also be emphasized that engaging in voluntary activities can play a significant role in shaping perceived self-efficacy by modifying personal sources of efficacy. As Bandura (2001, pp. 121–153) stated, specific human attributes represent motivational potential; however, it is the outcomes of undertaken actions that ultimately determine an individual's engagement in intentional activity.

Research findings (Stawiarska, 2001; Kata, 2010, pp. 30–31; Górecki, 2013; Bang et al., 2022; Matsumura et al., 2023) indicate several key factors that contribute to strengthening the sources of self-efficacy through volunteering, including:

1. Self-creation, which is described as a form of learning through personal experience, shaping self-awareness, and constructing a coherent identity;
2. Axiological and normative functions of volunteering, responsible for the formation and prioritization of socially valued norms, as well as reinforcing ideals of tolerance, goodness and selflessness;
3. Self-education, enabling personal and social development;
4. Experiences of social affiliation, which fulfil the needs for belonging and social recognition, as well as promoting the development of empathy;
5. Constructive coping with stress, often facilitated by functioning within interpersonal networks and/or receiving social support;
6. Receiving feedback on completed tasks;
7. Perceiving a high quality of one's own life, primarily as a result of deriving satisfaction from helping others, maintaining high self-esteem and self-worth, building self-trust, distancing oneself from personal problems, experiencing a sense of purpose, and engaging in positive emotional states.

In the context of the present study, the findings of Travis, Solomon, and Waul (2010) are particularly relevant. They identified several factors that influence a successful reintegration of former prisoners, including personal and situational characteristics, family systems, community influence, and public policy.

Similarly, MacKenzie (2006), in a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of correctional rehabilitation programs, emphasized the crucial role of psychological factors, particularly self-confidence. He highlighted the importance of working with prisoners on enhancing their sense of self-efficacy by developing and reinforcing internal coping mechanisms, as well as leveraging external resources in the environment (Kwiatkowski, 2020).

In English-language literature, the role of volunteering in fostering a sense of responsibility and being a part of society among incarcerated individuals is widely acknowledged. For instance, the prisoners' participation in the *Inside-Out Prison Exchange* leads to a significant increase in self-efficacy, positively influencing their attitudes toward civic engagement, including volunteering, both during incarceration and after release. These findings also indicate that prisoners who develop a strong sense of self-efficacy are more inclined to engage in constructive activities such as volunteering, facilitating the reha-

bilitation process. Volunteering, whether initiated by prisoners themselves or in collaboration with external partners, contributes to reduced recidivism and increases inmates' life satisfaction and social skills (Allred et al., 2013).

In Poland, the vast majority of research on prisoners working as volunteers focuses on the rehabilitative functions of volunteering and the types of activities undertaken. The studies confirm the resocialization potential of volunteering. Inmates involved in volunteer work acquire new skills and competencies essential for successful social reintegration (Frysztak, 2020; Lewicka-Zelent & Pytka, 2021). An important factor for them is the sense of being needed and appreciated. Through volunteer activities, inmates meet their emotional, spiritual, and developmental needs, such as love, closeness, recognition, respect, and self-actualization (Deka, 2007). When inmates act to benefit others in the free world, their thinking about themselves and their past lives gradually transforms. They learn how to build healthy interpersonal relationships, analyse their own behaviors, and set new, constructive goals for the future (Krakowiak & Paczkowska, 2014; Buczyńska, 2015; Weissbrot-Koziarska & Kanios, 2022). Sokołowska (2015) emphasized the potential of care-related activities triggering resocialization potential as well as acts which develop empathy and respect for vulnerable and dependent individuals. Furthermore, research conducted by Wypior (2019) on the relationship between empathy levels and attitudes toward volunteering among incarcerated women revealed that individuals with higher empathy were more likely to engage in volunteer activities. This highlights the need to view volunteering as a rehabilitative tool that shapes inmates' attitudes and supports their social reintegration (Fidelus, 2011; Krakowiak & Paczkowska, 2014; Deka et al., 2016).

To conclude, the relationship between self-efficacy and the dimensions of attitudes toward volunteering remains underexplored. While isolated studies have addressed the role of volunteering in rehabilitation, there is a noticeable lack of in-depth empirical analyses focused on uncovering the mechanisms underlying this relationship among incarcerated individuals.

## Research methodology

### Research problem and hypotheses

This study sought to answer the following research question: What types of relationships exist between perceptions of sources of self-efficacy and dimensions of attitudes toward volunteering among individuals serving prison sentences? In order to address this question, four research hypotheses were formulated:

**H1:** There are statistically significant correlations between perceptions of sources of self-efficacy and the intensity of the cognitive dimension of attitudes toward volunteering among individuals serving prison sentences.

**H2:** There are statistically significant relationships between perceptions of sources of self-efficacy and the intensity of the emotional dimension of attitudes toward volunteering in the studied group.

**H3:** There are statistically significant associations between perceptions of sources of self-efficacy and the intensity of the behavioral dimension of attitudes toward volunteering among the inmates.

**H4:** Sources of self-efficacy serve as predictors of the intensity of the dimensions constituting attitudes toward volunteering among incarcerated individuals.

### Research procedure

The study was conducted in 2023 in Poland. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Part of the data collection was carried out by prisoners participating in a family studies master's seminar at the Centre for Inmates of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) at the Lublin Detention Centre. The remaining surveys were distributed by officers of the Prison Service in other penal institutions within the Lublin District.

### Characteristics of the study participants

The analyses included responses from 119 incarcerated Polish men, aged between 20 and 64. The participants answered questions related to their in-



volvement in helping others. The level of engagement in altruistic acts varied: none of the respondents formally belonged to volunteer organizations; however, 60% reported informal involvement in helping others, which may be interpreted as a form of altruistic behavior. Simultaneously, 52% of respondents expressed a need to receive informal help from others.

## **Psychosocial measurement tools**

To verify the stated hypotheses, two research instruments were used:

1. *The Self-Assessment of Life Questionnaire* by I. Niewiadomska (2007), designed to examine perceived sources of self-efficacy. The first section focuses on the experience of stress as a source of self-efficacy perception. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) calculated on a group of 296 offenders was 0.83 for the perception of current problematic situations (Niewiadomska, 2007). The second section measures self-efficacy derived from the intensity of experienced successes. Cronbach's alpha calculated on a sample of 296 current and former inmates was 0.81 for the occurrence of successes (Niewiadomska, 2007). The third section assesses self-efficacy related to the intensity of perceived failures, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 for the occurrence of failures, based on 721 inmates (Niewiadomska et al., 2014). The final section contains items relating to the fourth type of source, the intensity of social persuasion. Cronbach's alpha calculated on a group of 721 inmates totalled to 0.93 for the occurrence of current social persuasions (Niewiadomska et al., 2014).
2. *The Questionnaire on Prisoners' Attitudes Toward Volunteering*, authored by M. Kalinowski, I. Niewiadomska, A. Woźniak, and W. Remijasz (2022), consists of 34 questions. The first section of the tool includes 9 items focused on the cognitive dimension of attitudes toward volunteering. The second section comprises 12 items regarding the emotional dimension. Finally, the third section contains 13 items assessing the behavioral dimension of attitudes toward volunteering.

Based on factor analysis, three factors were identified. The first factor contains 7 questions focused on the cognitive dimension: 1) A volunteer should be responsible – factor loading (fl): 0.776; 2) A volunteer should be selfless –

fl: 0.747; 3) Volunteering is needed in society – fl: 0.742; 4) Anyone can benefit from volunteer help (e.g., an inmate) – fl: 0.728; 5) Volunteering improves qualifications (e.g., through acquiring new skills) – fl: 0.651; 6) Volunteering benefits the volunteer – fl: 0.647; 7) I could become a volunteer – fl: 0.501.

The second factor is made up of 6 questions regarding the emotional dimension of attitudes toward volunteering: 1) Receiving help leads to social contempt – fl: 0.787; 2) Receiving help causes anxiety – fl: 0.720; 3) Helping others is a reason for pride – fl: 0.687; 4) Helping brings joy – fl: 0.614; 5) Receiving help brings joy – fl: 0.513; 6) Helping causes envy in others – fl: 0.492.

The third factor contains 6 questions based on the behavioral dimension of attitudes toward volunteering: 1) Receiving help strengthens my self-confidence – fl: 0.611; 2) I avoid accepting offers of help – fl: 0.594; 3) I avoid offering help – fl: 0.594; 4) I try to reciprocate the help I have received – fl: 0.594; 5) Receiving help brings happiness – fl: 0.530; 6) I refuse offered help – fl: 0.517

The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha), calculated for the sample of 119 incarcerated men, was 0.68 for the factors identified in the tested method.

### Statistical analyses used

Factor analysis was carried out to identify the factors in the *Questionnaire on Prisoners' Attitudes Toward Volunteering*. Whereas to analyse the relationships between the perception of sources of self-efficacy and the intensity of the dimensions constituting the attitude toward volunteering in individuals serving a prison sentence, Pearson's parametric correlation test was used. To identify predictors of the intensity of dimensions constituting the attitude of prisoners toward volunteering, linear regression analysis was applied.

### Results of the study

Table 1 presents results of the correlation analysis, which serve as the basis for verifying three research hypotheses. These hypotheses assumed that perceptions of sources of self-efficacy among individuals serving prison sentences

significantly correlate with the intensity of attitudes toward volunteering in three dimensions: cognitive (H1), emotional (H2), and behavioral (H3) – see Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation results between sources of self-efficacy and the intensity of attitudes toward volunteering among incarcerated individuals ( $N = 119$ )

Sources of self-efficacy	Dimensions of attitudes toward volunteering		
	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
Intensity of experienced stress	$r = -0.016$	$r = 0.469^{***}$	$r = 0.091$
Intensity of experienced successes	$r = -0.011$	$r = 0.405^{***}$	$r = 0.030$
Intensity of experienced failures	$r = 0.032$	$r = 0.286^{**}$	$r = 0.097$
Intensity of social persuasion	$r = -0.049$	$r = 0.404^{***}$	$r = 0.019$

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$

Source: Authors' research.

Based on the data presented in Table 1, two conclusions can be drawn. First, perceptions of sources of self-efficacy among inmates do not significantly correlate with the intensity of attitudes toward volunteering in two dimensions – cognitive and behavioral. Second, significant correlations were found between sources of self-efficacy and the emotional dimension of attitudes toward volunteering. Specifically, within the studied group an increase in emotional ambivalence toward volunteering (because of the simultaneous experience of pride and joy whilst in a helping situation, along with feelings of contempt and envy from others) correlates significantly with the elevated intensity of:

1. Stress experienced due to need deprivation, physical and/or psychological overload, physical and/or emotional suffering, intrapsychic and/or interpersonal conflict, feelings of threat, frustration in goal attainment and/or intense novelty of incoming stimuli ( $r = 0.469$ ;  $p < 0.001$ );
2. Success experienced in the personal, family, professional, and/or social areas ( $r = 0.405$ ;  $p < 0.001$ );
3. Failures experienced in personal, family, professional, and/or social areas ( $r = 0.286$ ;  $p < 0.01$ );

4. Social persuasion regarding positive solutions in terms of implementing plans, coping with experienced anxiety, conflict resolution, enduring physical and/or emotional pain with dignity, life success achievement potential, constructive need fulfillment, and task effectiveness ( $r = 0.404$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Summarising the presented empirical analyses, it can be stated that support for Hypothesis 2 exists, which assumed that statistically significant relationships exist between perception of sources of self-efficacy and the emotional dimension of attitudes toward volunteering among incarcerated individuals. However, the two remaining hypotheses, which predicted significant correlations between self-efficacy sources and the cognitive (H1) and behavioral (H3) dimensions of volunteering attitudes, were not confirmed. To test Hypothesis 4, which proposed that sources of self-efficacy are predictors of the dimensions constituting inmates' attitudes toward volunteering, linear regression analysis was conducted. The analysis showed that predictive properties of sources of self-efficacy could be examined only for the emotional dimension of volunteering attitudes ( $F = 29.010$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). For the cognitive and behavioral dimensions, the resulting predictive models were not statistically significant.

Table 2 presents the results of a linear regression analysis aimed at identifying the predictive functions of sources of self-efficacy in relation to the emotional dimension of attitudes toward volunteering among incarcerated individuals. The regression analysis (accounting for 20% of the variance) revealed a single significant predictor: the level of experienced stress ( $\text{Beta} = 0.450$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that an increase in emotional ambivalence toward volunteering is generated by heightened levels of stress associated with unmet needs, excessive physical and/or psychological burden, physical and/or emotional suffering, intrapsychic and/or interpersonal conflicts, feelings of threat, frustration stemming from goal obstruction, and/or overstimulation from novel stimuli.

Table 2. Linear regression results indicating predictive functions of sources of self-efficacy for the emotional dimension of attitudes toward volunteering among inmates ( $N = 119$ )

Predictive model for the emotional dimension	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	7.569	1.531		4.946	< 0.001
Intensity of experienced stress	0.150	0.028	0.450	5.386	< 0.001
$F = 29.010; p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.203$					

Source: Authors' research.

Based on the regression results, Hypothesis 4 was partially confirmed, as among the sources of self-efficacy assessed in the group of prisoners, only the level of experienced stress emerged as a significant predictor of the emotional dimension of attitudes toward volunteering. However, from the pool of other self-efficacy sources (intensity of experienced successes, levels of perceived failures, experience of social persuasion), no predictors could be identified for the cognitive or behavioral dimensions of volunteering attitudes among the incarcerated participants.

## Discussion of results and conclusions

The findings of the conducted study indicate the significant role of self-efficacy sources in shaping the emotional dimension of attitudes toward volunteering among individuals serving prison sentences. Various sources of perceived self-efficacy co-occur with the emotional ambivalence experienced by inmates in relation to voluntary activities. This conclusion is supported by the fact that high levels of perceived stress, experienced successes, failures, and/or social persuasion significantly co-occur with both positive and negative emotions, for instance, providing help may evoke the feelings of pride and joy, yet also arouse envy from others; likewise, receiving help may simultaneously bring joy, but also anxiety and a sense of social disdain. It is also important to highlight that the level of perceived stress serves a predictive function for the emotional dimension of inmates' attitudes toward volunteering, both in terms of providing altruistic support and receiving assistance

from volunteers. This means that an increase in perceived stress significantly contributes to the intensification of emotional ambivalence of prisoners in relation to selfless help, whether given or received.

The relationships identified in this study align with the information provided in literature, which emphasize that the emotional aspect of human attitudes is shaped in the context of affective states accompanying task performance, including those associated with stress (Wojciszke, 2009; Niewiadomska, 2010a; 2010b). Therefore, it can be concluded that the regulatory functions of self-efficacy sources in shaping prosocial attitudes among incarcerated individuals lie in initiating emotional ambivalence, which sustains motivation toward desired behavioral change and decides on the level of engagement in intentional activity (Bandura, 2001, pp. 121–153; Sokołowska, 2015; Braun, 2019).

Future research should aim to confirm this paradoxical motivational mechanism among prisoners, which suggests that sources of self-efficacy strengthen emotional ambivalence toward prosocial behavior. It is possible that this very mechanism plays a role in social inclusion of prisoners, similar to the capacity for building interpersonal relationships, possessing empathy, reflecting on important life goals, or acquiring new skills and competencies crucial for successful social reintegration (Krakowiak & Paczkowska, 2014; Buczyńska, 2015; Wypior, 2019; Frysztak, 2020; Nowak, 2020; Lewicka-Zelent & Pytka, 2021; Weissbrot-Koziarska & Kanios, 2022; Gęca et al., 2024; Kołodziejak et al., 2024).

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